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As to the best method of studying a Psalm, I would advise you not to examine any commentary until you are able to read the Psalm fluently in Hebrew, to translate it readily into English, and to analyze every word. Indeed, you ought not to consider that you have accomplished your task until you can take the Revised English Version in your hand and at sight translate it into the original Hebrew. This is done more easily than you imagine. You will now enjoy studying Delitzsch, which I would advise you to read first of all. Accustom yourself likewise to take notes, both grammatical and otherwise, and carefully rewrite or condense the most important hints given by other commentators, and so begin to prepare your own commentary. Such a commentary will be of more value to you than all the rest in your library, and will become fuller on each repeated study of a Psalm.

After such elaborate study of a Psalm, it will be a delight for you to present the doctrinal and practical truths therein contained to your congregation; and both you and they will be richly rewarded by your labors.

THE INCONGRUOUS CLAUSE IN GEN. XIII. 10.

BY PROF. W. W. MOORE, D. D.,

Union Theological Seminary, Hampden Sidney, Va.

I. ZOAR.

“And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every-where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the land of Egypt, *as thou comest unto Zoar*.” The last clause seems, from its position, to qualify “the land of Egypt.” But this construction deprives the statement of all meaning, inasmuch as Zoar was not in or near the land of Egypt. The clause is equally unintelligible, whether we place the pentapolis, of which Zoar was a member, at the southern or at the northern end of the Dead Sea.

Most commentators quietly ignore this difficulty. Others evade it by arbitrarily re-shaping the whole sentence. For instance, Bush¹ would connect the clause under consideration with the first part of the verse, thus, “And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every-where, as thou comest to Zoar (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah), even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.” This view, besides implying that the author wrote such a clumsy description that every reader must recast the whole of it to get his meaning, simply exchanges one difficulty for another. If the plain was “well watered *every-where*,” as the author has just stated, why should he specify any particular portion of it? Canon Tristram, adopting the theory that now has the strongest support, locates the cities of the plain north of the Dead Sea, and would identify Zi’ara with Zoar. Zi’ara is a bold headland projecting westward from the mountains of Moab, and overlooking the Jordan valley.² But why should a place 3000 feet above the plain, and surrounded by stony ground, be mentioned as the heart of this well watered valley? The clause seems to mean that Zoar was the richest spot of all this fertile region; but the fact is that Zi’ara is not nearly so well watered as the rest of the plain. Nor can

¹ “Notes on Genesis” *in loco*.

² “The Land of Moab.” H. B. Tristram. P. 343.

it be argued that the clause "as thou comest to Zoar" was intended by the author to identify the plain of which he was speaking. For that would be to define the well known by the little known. The "circuit of the Jordan" is and always has been *the* landmark of Palestine; whereas Zoar has always been an insignificant place. In short, it would be absurd to identify "the plain" by reference to Zoar.

Dr. Selah Merrill's reconstruction of the verse is slightly different. He makes the last clause qualify the first, throwing all the middle portion of the verse into a parenthesis, thus, "And Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan (that it was well watered every-where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt) until thou comest to Zoar." That is, Lot saw all the plain of Jordan as far as Zoar, which, says Merrill, was both the limit of the plain and the limit of vision in that direction.¹ But that depends upon the location of Zoar. We have seen that Tristram finds it at Zi'ara, on a mountain spur 3000 feet above the level of the valley. Conder finds it at Shaghur, in the plain of Shittim.² Merrill himself finds it at Ektanu, making a precarious argument for this identification on the ground that *Ektanu* is the Hebrew word *qatan*, which means "little," as *tsoar* also does! Now, neither his own preferred site, Ektanu, nor Shaghur, nor Zi'ara, seems to be "the limit of vision in that direction." So that Merrill's re-arrangement is as valueless as Bush's. But even if this arbitrary shifting of clauses yielded a satisfactory meaning, the question remains, How came this awkward clause to stand last in the sentence, when it was intended to modify a statement that stands first? How came this marvelously clear writer to allow four dissevering clauses to interpose between two statements whose juxtaposition was indispensable to the understanding of one of them?

Moreover, let it be observed that Gen. XIX. 22 *gives the origin of the name* "Zoar," the place having been called Bela before that. Hence, if we retain Zoar in Gen. XIII. 10, we involve the author in an unexplained anachronism, since he mentions a city by a name that it did not then have. The name *might* be used by anticipation, it is true; but this is highly improbable. In Gen. XIV. 2, where Bela is mentioned, an explanatory parenthesis is added, identifying Bela with Zoar, as if in view of Gen. XIX. 22. In Gen. XIV. 8, after an interval of only six verses, the same explanation is carefully inserted. Now can we believe that *in the same period* Zoar would be mentioned for the *first* time (Gen. XIII. 10) without any mention of Bela and without any glance at Gen. XIX. 22?

II. ZOR.

Such considerations as those above stated force us to the conclusion that "Zoar" *is not the true reading in this passage*. Accordingly, several careful students of biblical geography, including the Rev. Archibald Henderson³ and Dr. H. Clay Trumbull,⁴ have proposed to read "Zar" or "Zor." Mr. Henderson makes this mean the frontier fortress of Egypt. Dr. Trumbull makes it mean the border land of Eastern Lower Egypt, which was once protected by the Great

¹ "East of the Jordan." Selah Merrill. P. 233.

² "Heth and Moab." C. R. Conder. P. 150.

³ "Palestine," in the series of Hand-books for Bible-classes.

⁴ "Quarterly Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund for October, 1884." *Sunday School Times*, Nov. 22, 1884.

Wall extending across the isthmus from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. Either of these views is a vast advance on "Zoar;" but they also are open to serious objections. For example, "Zor" is not the Hebrew equivalent of the Egyptian "Zor." "Zor" fails to account for the letter 'Ayin in "Zoar" (צֹרַר). Again, the fortified country of the isthmus was not the most fertile part of the land of Egypt, and would fail utterly to meet the high requirement of the words "well watered every-where, even as the garden of Jehovah" (Gen. II. 10: "A river went out of Eden to water the garden"). Therefore, the true solution has not yet been reached, though we are undoubtedly moving in the right direction.¹

III. ZOAN.

The language "like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar" clearly implies (1) that Zoar is not the same as the land of Egypt, (2) that Zoar is in the land of Egypt, and (3) that Zoar is a definite place, a well-known town, rather than a country. Neither of the views above given meets these conditions. Now, let us retain the clauses in their true order, and read as follows: "And Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every-where (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah), even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto *Zoan*." There! How slight the change! How great the gain! "Zoar" is obviously a not unnatural error of transcription for "Zoan." See how easily one of those words can be mistaken for the other in English. The difference between them in Hebrew is even smaller, as we may see by placing them side by side,—צֹעַן = Zoan, צֶעַר = Zoar. It is just the difference between the two final letters ן and ר, which are not strikingly dissimilar in appearance, especially in the old writing that preceded the square character now in use. How natural, then, that a copyist, under the influence of his greater familiarity with Zoar and the apparent connection with the Jordan valley, should have written צֶעַר for צֹעַן. He knew where Zoar was. Probably he did not know so much about Zoan. Geography never was a strong point with the ancients. And so, whether unwittingly or of set purpose, he made the change that disjointed the description and baffled the commentators.

Having shown the *a priori* probability that *Zoan* is the true reading, let us proceed to the proof. This is no merely conjectural emendation. The Syriac version reads, "And Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan,

¹ Every careful reader of Dr. Trumbull's able and conclusive monograph on Kadesh Barnea must recognize the importance of the great wall of Egypt as a geographical factor. But Dr. Trumbull seems disposed to overestimate its value. Having used it as a key to unlock the mystery of Kadesh Barnea and the route of the Exodus, he would now use it to solve also the geographical problem of Gen. xiii. 10, and even Deut. xxxiv. 3. The proof that he is overworking the wall as a landmark may be found in his treatment of this last passage, Deut. xxxiv. 1-3. Here, too, instead of "Zoar" he would read "Zor," though of course the necessity for a change does not exist here, as it did in Gen. xiii. 10; and he would have Moses looking all the way from Nebo to Egypt, and that too after his eye had completed the circuit of Israel's territory. According to the text, the comprehensive view ends with "the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm-trees, at Zoar," this town being the feature of the panorama that lay immediately before and nearest to the spectator. If "Zor" be substituted, see what a line and what a boundary we get! Dr. Trumbull admits that "Zoar" is not an exact transliteration of "Zor" (much less is *Zoan*); and yet such is his infatuation with the wall-country (Zor) that he would have us believe that both "Zoar" in Deut. xxxiv. 3, and "Zoan" in Ps. lxxviii. 12, 43, should be read "Zor"! Less radical and violent, as well as otherwise more probable and satisfactory, is the view presented below in III., which I shall proceed at once to discuss.

that it was well watered every-where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoan." Now, the richest part of the land of Egypt was "as thou comest unto Zoan." The adjacent delta-land, "well watered every-where," was of the most exuberant fertility. Mos'oudy, the Arab historian of the tenth century, says: "The place was formerly a district which had not its equal in Egypt for fine air, fertility and wealth. Gardens, plantations of palms and other trees, vines, and cultivated fields met the eye in every direction."¹ This opinion is fully borne out by the Letter of Panbesa,² which describes "the field of Zoan" as it was in the time of Moses. "Nothing can compare with it in the Theban land and soil," says this ancient document. "It is pleasant to live in. Its fields are full of good things, and life passes in constant plenty and abundance. Its canals are rich in fish, its lakes swarm with birds, its meadows are green with vegetables, there is no end of the lentiles; melons with a taste like honey grow in the irrigated fields. Its barns are full of wheat and durra, and reach as high as heaven. Onions and sesame are in the enclosures, and the apple-tree blooms. The vine, the almond-tree and the fig-tree grow in the gardens. Plenty and abundance are perpetual in it. He rejoices who has settled there."

Assuming the Mosaic authorship of Genesis, who was so likely to make this ideal country around Zoan the standard of fertility as the man who had lived there forty years and witnessed its succession of luxuriant crops? In his narrative, Abraham and Lot had recently left this land of rivers and canals and lakes, and therefore the comparison was all the more natural. The abundant waters of the plain of Jordan, "utilized as they then were by irrigation far and wide, must have made every part of it, as seen by Abraham and Lot, a very garden of Jehovah, recalling the traditions of their own eastern Paradise, or the glorious beauty of the scene they had recently left behind them at Zoan, where the beautiful Nile, led every-where through the thirsty soil, repaid the care by a fertility and luxuriance that had passed into a proverb."³

By the change of a single letter, then, we relieve the confusion of the clauses, diminish the topographical difficulty, acquit the author of anachronistic mention of Zoar and of the folly of identifying a celebrated plain by an obscure town, gain a distinct advance in the thought instead of an interrupting check upon it, and add greatly to the force of the description by naming as the standard of comparison in point of fertility "the field of Zoan," the kernel of the land of Egypt, the richest part of the richest country in the world.

¹ Quoted in "The Story of Tanis." By Amelia B. Edwards, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, Oct., 1886.

² "Records of the Past" (vol. VI.), and Brugsch's "History of Egypt" (vol. II., pp. 100-102).

³ "Hours with the Bible." C. Geikie. Vol. I., pp. 370-3